

High School in the 1960s and Now

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Times have changed since my mother went to high school in the 1960s. Most modern day teenagers will discover that they have had a much different school experience than that of their parents. Socially acceptable behavior and expectations, both inside and outside the classroom, have been altered.

In the 1960s, preparing to go to college was not as emphasized as much as it is in 2004. It was not necessarily important to go to college. Many schools did not even offer honors classes. One could have a high school education and still get a decent job upon graduation. This is becoming impossible as our state modernizes and more jobs require a college education and technological skills. As a result, the average student did not have as much homework as today's students have. If college was in someone's future, admission was based purely on academic achievement, or participation and excellence in a sport. Being in extracurricular activities, doing community service, and maintaining a job were not requirements for exclusive colleges as they are today. Few teenagers even had jobs while in high school in the 1960s. In 2004, at least half of all teens attending school have, at one time or another, had a job. As our society grows more complicated, and knowledge and time and stress management becomes essential, more responsibility is being added to the load of modern teenagers than most of their parents ever had.

Behavioral expectations are quite different as well. Teenagers stayed innocent much longer than teens do today. Dress codes required much more modest apparel and were strictly enforced. Girls had to wear skirts that went to their knees or be sent home. Nowadays, standards are more inclusive. Teens went to bed early and got up early, although not as early as some of the schools today require, sleeping about nine hours. Many teens in 2004 are lucky to get six hours of sleep due to the late bedtimes and early rising times. Of course, teenagers today sleep in on the weekends and teenagers then did not. Although debatable, teens in the 1960s respected their elders more and were responsible for certain chores around the house that many teenagers are simply not held accountable for in contemporary Illinois. Out-of-school pastimes were much the same as today.

The average family was much poorer than an average family in 2004. There were many more teens that rode a bus than teens that had cars, whereas the opposite is true today. Schools' budgets provided for all sports, music, and arts programs without a student having to pay for anything extra. Registration fees were minimal and any special project's materials were provided by the school. Teenagers are often required to pay for their own uniforms and instruments or did not have those programs at all available to them. Registration fees are much higher and do not include any extra books, and the students are expected to buy supplies needed for a project that are not available at school. Field trips were infrequent in the 1960s, and extended trips with specific classes or teams were rare. Many schools today offer trips to other countries with foreign language

classes, provided the students pay their own way. The idea of traveling to a different country while still in school and paying for it yourself would have seemed absurd to teenagers four decades ago. Teens are very lucky in this respect. They have many more opportunities to experience the world first hand than their parents did at their age

Teenagers of the 1960s and the 2000s have had a very different high school experience. They have had different expectations to live up to and different behaviors and ways of life to follow. Most will agree that life has gotten more difficult for these people who are not quite adults but no longer children. [From Student Historian's interview with Cheryl Cresswell, Oct. 10, 2004.]